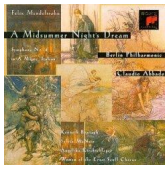
Felix Mendelssohn - Midsummer Night's Dream (2012)



1. Overture, Op. 21 2. Incidental Music, Op.61: No. 1 Scherzo 3. Incidental Music, Op.61: No. 2 L'istesso Tempo: 'How now, spirit, whither wander you?' 4. Incidental Music, Op.61: Fairy March 5. Incidental Music, Op.61: No. 3 Song With Chorus 6. Incidental Music, Op.61: No. 4 Andante: 'What thou seest when thou dost wake?' 7. Incidental Music, Op.61: No. 5 Intermezzo. Allegro Aspassionato: 'This is thy negligence' 8. Incidental Music, Op.61: No. 7 Notturno 9. Incidental Music, Op.61: No. 8 Andante: 'And now I have the boy' 10. Incidental Music, Op.61: No. 9 Wedding March 11. Incidental Music, Op.61: Finale. Allegro Di Molto: 'Through the house give glimmering' Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra Kenneth Branagh (Spoken Vocals) Claudio Abbado - conductor

It's good to be able to report that Abbado's Mendelssohn is as fresh and vivacious as ever. His LSO recordings of the symphonies (on DG) were very fine, but this new Berlin account of the Italian Symphony – recorded live at the Berlin Philharmonic's 1995 New Year's Eve Concert – positively crackles with energy, especially in the whirlwind finale. The second movement's procession is beguilingly phrased and Abbado even convinces me that the weak Minuet is worth its place in this otherwise utterly marvellous work. The performance of Mendelssohn's equally delightful incidental music to A Midsummer Night's Dream is taken from the same concert, though Kenneth Branagh's narration was added later (he projects well and the acoustics are well matched, so the result feels perfectly natural). The extracts Branagh uses fit well with Mendelssohn's music (of which we hear all the important numbers) and concentrate on the central tussle between Titania and Oberon and the latter's confused conspiracy with Puck to untangle the love lives of the young Athenians. It's a heroic attempt to capture some of the magic of the play, and Branagh passes with flying colours (though I'm not totally convinced by Puck as a leprechaun). A delightful disc, then, beautifully packaged – though, curiously, without programme notes.-- Stephen Maddock, BBC Music Magazine

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